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2018

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### Citation of this paper:

Linkes, Snjezana; Ezekiel, Frederick; Lerch, Ashleigh; and Meadows, Ken, "Group Career Counselling for International Students: Evaluation and Promising Practices" (2018). *Centre for Teaching and Learning Publications*. 20.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/ctlpub/20>

# Group Career Counselling for International Students: Evaluation and Promising Practices

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## Abstract

Similar to trends in universities across North America, Western University has seen a 134% increase in international student enrolment from 2009-2017. Enrolment increases have corresponded with increased demand for career services to meet the unique needs of international students. Group career counselling for international students wishing to secure employment in Canada was piloted as a scalable program to meet increasing demands. Participants demonstrated significant improvements in their career development process, including improved cultural adjustment, self-understanding, job search strategies, and interview anxiety. Through this study, we present a promising, evidence-based, scalable model to meet growing career development demands among international students.

## Keywords

Career Counselling Practice, Process & Outcomes; Career Assessment; Group Counselling; Undergraduates & Early Adults

## Growing Demands

Comparing the demographic makeup of Canadian universities twenty years ago and now, there is a noticeable increase of registered international students. More than 160,000 international students are enrolled annually in educational programs in Canada, with approximately 90,000 international students enrolled in universities (McMullen & Elias, 2011). According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC, 2012), international students represent approximately 9% of full-time registered students in undergraduate programs and slightly over 20% of students enrolled in graduate programs, with students attracted from more than 200 countries (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, CIC, 2009).

At Western University, there are growing numbers in the undergraduate and graduate international student population, from 1,466 (5.9% of full time student enrolment) international students in the 2009-2010 academic year to 3,445 (11.9% of full time student enrolment) in the 2016-2017 academic year, representing a 134% increase in

international student enrolment. With the university's growth in the international student population, the demands on services for international students have also continued to grow.

## Increased Demand for Service Among International Students

International students continue to access career counselling services and programs in large numbers. Western University recorded an increase of career counselling services accessed by international students such that 24% of all counselling hours were attended by international students in the 2015-2016 academic year, up from 9% in 2008-2009.

## Unique Career Needs

Concomitant with the need to address international students increased demand for services and programming is the necessity to address the distinct nature of some of their career needs. The distinct career needs of international students have been identified in the literature, and have predominately focused on problems of adjustment,

including language proficiency, academic demands, loneliness, establishing a new support network, culture shock, gender role expectations, and values conflicts (Arthur, 2008; Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991, 1995; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Pope, 2007). Research on the experiences of international students has typically emphasized the initial phase of cross-cultural adjustment, with less attention on international students' career development and transition to employment following completion of their studies (Arthur, 2007, 2008; Berry, 2001, 2008; Chen, 1999; Odberg, 1960; Pedersen, 1995).

### Acculturative Stress and Barriers to Employment

During university life, international students, like any other student, deal with the typical stressors associated with financial demands, academic pressures, loneliness, and career indecision (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). International and immigrant students also face unique issues related to their career development as well as challenges associated with adapting to a foreign country. Such challenges include culture shock, confusion about role expectations, homesickness, loss of social support, discrimination, and language barriers (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). These experiences, collectively referred to as "acculturative stress", relate to specific types of difficulties associated

with individuals' cross-cultural encounters, which can manifest in a range of adjustment and personal concerns (Bowman & Evans, 2006).

### Language Barriers

Language proficiency has been shown to be linked to experiences of discrimination among new immigrants in Canada, with stronger accents from native languages being linked to increased experiences of discrimination and prejudice (Bowman & Evans, 2006). Language capacity, including both second language ability and confidence about speaking in the second language, has been implicated as a barrier to career decision making, career exploration, and navigation of selection processes (e.g., communicating in an interview setting) for international students (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). Because of this, some students may pursue occupations that do not require high levels of English proficiency (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). Diemer and Ali (2009) assert that being raised in one environment and then being transplanted to another with a different language, customs, and occupational structure can profoundly impact the types of jobs one pursues and often results in immigrants securing employment in lower status, lower paying jobs. This change in occupational options and social status may result in lowered self-esteem, shame, depression, anxiety, and internalized classicism (Diemer & Ali, 2009). Numerous

considerations contribute to the degree of a person's acculturation, such as: Cultural heritage, ethnicity, ethnic pride and identity, inter-ethnic interactions, and inter-ethnic distance (Niles & Harris-Bowlsby, 2009), with English language fluency being one of the strongest predictors (Ma & Yeh, 2010). These common needs and considerations among international students' make group counselling a potentially impactful tool as it supports normalization of feelings and experiences, as well as opportunities to learn from shared experiences among members of the group.

### Securing Employment in Canada

Recent research has indicated that international students' primary career-related concerns are job search and placement (Shen & Herr, 2004; Spencer-Rodgers, 2000). More comprehensive approaches to support the job search, placement, and career decision-making needs of international students are needed, especially when considering decisions to pursue employment and immigration to Canada (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). One pathway to employment and longer term immigration available to international students studying in Canada involves the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP), which allows international students to work in Canada after graduation. The PGWPP allows students who have graduated from a partici-

pating Canadian postsecondary institution to gain valuable Canadian experience. Skilled Canadian work experience gained through PGWPP helps graduates qualify for permanent residence in Canada through express entry (CIC, 2016). Approximately 30% of international student graduates change their immigration status by securing post-graduate work permits, indicating a significant interest among international students to secure work and live in Canada post-graduation (OECD, 2011).

Many countries, for example, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and France, have shifted their immigration policies to attract international students to stay as permanent residents because they are seen as valuable sources of skilled labour. Available research suggests that the decision-making process to stay in the destination country is complex, involving perceived career and lifestyle opportunities in both home and host cultures (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). Identified barriers in the limited research on international students' job search processes include language proficiency, networking and interview expectations, and whether or not employers value their international experience (Arthur & Flynn, 2012; Sangganjanavanich, Lenz, & Cavazos, 2011). These complex career development needs, coupled with student interests to secure employment post-graduation indicates the importance of offering high-quality, tailored career development supports for

international students.

### Preferred Support

At present, there is a gap in research exploring the experiences of international students in the final stage of their educational programs who wish to secure employment in the country in which they are studying (Arthur, 2003b, 2008; Leung, 2007). International students have expressed needs for specific support while at university, including: Employment experience while in school, services specific to international student's needs, services specific to needs at graduation, information on immigration processes, help with job search processes, better understanding of cultural nuances, concrete help to access local labour market, identifying employers who are accepting of international students, and help to secure international student mentors (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014). With this in mind, the career counselling team at Western University developed the Group Career Counselling for International Students program, and has offered two of such groups per academic year since 2011.

### Group Career Counselling

Group counselling is "an interpersonal process that stresses conscious thoughts, feelings, and behaviours...[with a focus on growth and]...discovering internal resources of strength." (Corey, 2004, p. 5). Group career counselling is characterized by three core elements: "1) career planning and decision-making

require input about occupations; 2) accurate data about self (abilities, interests, and values) are needed; and 3) the process offers opportunities to explore personal meaning, identify and examine subjective aspects of the self, get feedback from others, and try on roles." (Pyle, 1986, p. 3).

### Why Offer Group Career Counselling?

Group counselling is a form of psycho-educational counselling that can be used among groups of individuals with common interest, goals, or experiences, who are seeking similar outcomes through the pursuit of counselling. The rationale for offering group career counselling as an alternative to individual counselling is based on the unique needs of international students and how this population benefits from a group format over an individual counselling format. Dipeolu, Kang, and Cooper (2007) suggest that the benefits of a group format for counselling include: (1) normalization of feelings and decreased isolation, (2) increased social support, (3) opportunities to increase English language skills, and (4) promotion of information sharing for problem-solving and accessing resources. Carr, Koyama, and Thiagarajan (2003) examined the advantages of a support group to Asian women and noted that the benefits of a group format contributed to feelings of hope, validation of feelings, socialization with peers, practicing English without judgement,

and addressing stress related to academic, personal, and acculturation concerns. While these benefits were identified within the scope of mental health-related counselling, group counselling also provides a promising model through which to provide career counselling services, particularly among international students pursuing a common goal of acquiring employment post-graduation. Group counselling also offers a scalable model to meet increased demands for career services among international students without proportionate increases in resourcing or staffing.

### The Group Counselling for International Students Program

#### Program structure.

Since the program was initiated in 2010, the content, design, duration, and assessment strategy of the program has evolved substantively. During the 2010-2011 academic year, two pilot group counselling cohorts were offered for 16 participants. Each cohort included five group counselling sessions at a duration of 90 minutes each. A pilot evaluation included measurement of student satisfactions coupled with daily reflections and testimonials. Over the first three years of offering the program, the structure and activities were refined, session duration was increased, and demand continued to grow, leading to an interest in formally evaluating the program through this research study. From 2013-2015, the time frame for this research,

four group counselling cohorts were facilitated (one per academic term). Each group included eight 3-hour sessions, covering topics that included adjustment and culture shock, self-identify, skills identification, job search strategies and self-promotion, developing an application package, and maintaining employment in Canada (see Table 1 for more information on session topics, learning outcomes and sample activities). Students participated in cohorts to support community building and validation of emotions and experiences throughout the sessions.

#### Measuring program

**outcomes.** As a relatively new model of career service provision for international students, measurement of program outcomes and effectiveness was a key consideration in the development of this program. Three validated scales which aligned with the program outcomes were selected. The Career Optimism scale is a subscale of the Career Futures Inventory, and measures students' disposition toward their career plans, possibilities and prospects (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005). Career optimism has been shown to be linked to positive career development outcomes, including persevering through difficult job search processes, effective establishment of career plans, and adaptability to novel situations (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005). The Performance Anxiety subscale of the Measure of Anxiety in Selection Interviews (MASI)

scale was used to measure students' confidence in their ability to perform well in an interview setting, and important outcome of the group counselling program (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004). The Diversity Attitudes subscale of the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire is a measure of an individual's self-understanding in relation to the diverse world, and ability to effectively build relationships with diverse others (Moely, Mercer, Ilustre, Miron, & McFarland, 2002). This measure is relevant to students' ability to establish effective relationships within the group counselling environment, as well as confidence in relating to future employers and colleagues in the workplace. Engaging in meaningful conversation and reflection in a diverse group counselling model is expected to contribute to participants' appreciation of diversity.

In addition to the scales identified above, a number of outcomes-based measurement items were developed collaboratively by the project researchers (KM & FE) and career counsellors (SL & AL), to measure whether the program was accomplishing its other intended outcomes. These items were categorized into seven key areas: Cultural adaptation, self-understanding, skills identification, job search strategies, application package preparation, self-promotion, and maintaining employment.

#### Purpose of this Study

There is a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness



Table 1

*Session topics, outcomes and sample activities/*

Session Outcomes	Activities
<b>Session #1: Adjustment and Culture Shock</b> - Understand how the psycho-educational group functions - Recognize and cope with culture shock - Awareness of resources available at the University and in the community	- Introduction of counsellor(s) and participants - Establish the group goals and expectations - Icebreaker and discussion questions related to culture shock and personal experiences
<b>Session #2: "Who Am I?" Assessment</b> - Understanding and self-awareness of personality, values, skills, interests - Understanding and knowledge of how personal factors affect career decision making	- Group completion of "Who am I" career assessment, developed by Career Services at York University
<b>Session #3: Skills Identification</b> - Identify core competencies and transferrable skills - Knowledge of skills employers value - How to identify the desired skills in job ads	- Small group discussion of skills developed in country of origin and Canada - List the skills that an employer is seeking from a variety of job ads, carousel style - Discussion of personal transferrable skills
<b>Session #4: Job Search Strategies</b> - Understand the effective job search process - How to access the hidden job market - How to network with employers	- Develop and practice an "elevator pitch" - Practice requesting informational interviews
<b>Session #5: Application Package</b> - Understanding of the key components and how to create an effective resume, cover letter, LinkedIn profile, and portfolio - How to secure references - Self-awareness of skills, accomplishments, experiences, and education, and connect with the job opportunity	- Peer feedback on resumes and cover letters, roundtable style
<b>Session #6: Self-Promotion</b> - Understand common types of interview questions and strategies to answer questions - Understand factors that influence effectiveness of interview performance - Identify and apply strategies to reduce interview anxiety	- Practice responding to interview questions with peer feedback, in dyads
<b>Session #7: Negotiation and Maintaining Employment in Canada</b> - How to negotiate a job offer - Understand the expectations of employers and the rights of workers in Canada - How to manage common workplace concerns	- Group discussion of anticipated difficulties in the workplace, and strategies to manage conflict or challenging transitions - Apply strategies to case studies
<b>Session #8: Future Steps and Group Closure</b> - Address the feelings of ending a group - Develop career future plans - Celebrate the relationships among members	- Ideal work day activity - Share positive comments about the strengths observed in other group members, as yarn toss activity

of a group counselling approach designed to address the unique needs of international students within a career context. A literature search using terms "group

counselling", "career", and "international students" both individually and in combination did not return any published examples on the topic of group career

counselling with international students. Therefore, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirically-based research study to investigate the advantages

and effectiveness of group career counselling for international students.

### Research Questions

The research questions investigated in this study were grounded in the intended outcomes of group career counselling for international students. These questions include:

- 1) What is the impact of group career counselling for international students?
- 2) What topics or components of group counselling do students qualitatively report as having the greatest impact on them?

### Hypotheses:

Students will demonstrate improvements from the beginning of the program to the end in the following career competencies: cultural adjustment, self-understanding, skills identification, job search strategies, application package development, self-promotion, strategies for maintaining employment; career optimism, interview anxiety, and attitudes toward diversity.

### Method

#### Participants

The research was conducted with four cohorts of international undergraduate and graduate students from fall 2013 to winter 2015. Of the 61 students taking part in the Group Career Counselling for Inter-

national Students program, a total of 32 participated in the research (65%). Across all cohorts, 27 males and 34 females participated in group counselling, of whom 31 students were enrolled in undergraduate studies and 30 were enrolled in graduate studies. The country of origin of the majority of participants was China. Other countries of origin, in order of frequency of participation, included India, Rwanda, Barbados, Armenia, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Ukraine, and Vietnam.

### Measures

A mixed methods approach was used to assess effectiveness of the program. The quantitative and qualitative instruments used to assess client outcomes are described below.

#### Quantitative measures.

Quantitative measures were used to assess student knowledge and competencies in 10 core areas of interest. These 10 areas were identified based on the intended program outcomes. Thirty-three items were developed by the first author to assess change in knowledge and competencies in the following 7 areas: Cultural adjustment (5 items;  $\alpha = .68$ ), self-understanding (7 items;  $\alpha = .75$ ), skills identification (5 items;  $\alpha = .76$ ), job search strategies (6 items;  $\alpha = .87$ ), application package development (4 items;  $\alpha = .72$ ), self-promotion (3 items;  $\alpha = .81$ ), and maintaining employment (3 items;  $\alpha = .68$ ). All of the items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from

Strongly disagree (1) to Strong agree (5).

Validated measures were used to assess pre-post changes in three of the 10 areas: Career optimism (Rottinghaus et al., 2005), interview anxiety (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004), and attitude toward diversity (Moely et al., 2002). Participants rated their agreement with the items for all three measures on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5). Each measure is addressed in turn below.

**Career optimism.** Participants completed the 11-item Career Optimism subscale of the Career Futures Inventory (Rottinghaus et al., 2005) to assess their positive expectations in regards to their career development. Example items include “I get excited when I think about my career” and “I will definitely make the right decision in my career” (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). Rottinghaus and colleagues (2005) provide considerable support for the reliability and validity of the scale.

**Interview anxiety.** Participants completed the Performance Anxiety subscale of the Measure of Anxiety in Selection Interviews (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004) to assess their concern about their performance in a job interview. The subscale consists of six items (e.g., “In interviews, I get very nervous about whether my performance is good enough”, “During an interview, I

worry about what will happen if I don't get the position"). McCarthy and Goffin (2004) provide considerable support for the reliability and validity of the scale.

**Attitude toward diversity.** Participants' completed the Diversity Attitudes subscale of the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (Moely et al., 2002) to assess their perspectives on cultural diversity. Example items include "I enjoy meeting people who come from backgrounds very different from my own" and "Cultural diversity within a group makes the group more interesting and effective" (Moely et al., 2002). Moely and colleagues (2002) outline the reliability and validity of the scale.

**Qualitative measures.** Participants completed two forms of qualitative assessment as part of the program: Daily reflections and end of program testimonials. Each is addressed below.

*Daily reflections.* Students were asked to complete a reflection at the end of each daily session. They responded to the following four items on a piece of paper: (a) Three words to describe your day; (b) What did you learn today? (c) What did you like today? Dislike? and (d) Any suggestions for next time? Responses were collected and reviewed by the program facilitator and themes for each day were identified and shared back with the group at the following session. Students were invited to share comments and reflections

on these themes, which provided the counsellors with the opportunity to validate the findings with the students and clarify any comments. In some instances, students added additional context to themes that were identified. Counsellors reviewed this data and identified emergent themes across participants' daily reflection in alignment with the 10 core areas measured through quantitative elements of the study.

*Testimonials.* Career counsellors facilitating the program prompted students to reflect verbally on their experiences as participants in the group career counselling program during the final session of each group offered. Students shared their reflections, herein referred to as testimonials, verbally with the group. Testimonials were recorded in writing by research assistants. Written testimonials were also collected at the end of the final session.

## Procedure

All students in the program participated in the standard evaluation components of the program (i.e., the pre- and post-program survey, daily reflections, and testimonials). The pre-program surveys were administered on the first day of the program after program participants were welcomed to the program. The post-program survey was administered on the last day of the program after the program had wrapped up. Daily reflections were collected at the end of each

daily session. Testimonials were prompted and recorded in writing during the final session of group counselling.

Before the end of the final session for each group, students were invited by a staff member who was not involved with the facilitation of the program to participate in the formal research study, allowing their assessment data to be used for research purposes in addition to quality improvement of the program. The institutional Research Ethics Board approved this study.

## Data Analysis

**Quantitative analysis.** Analyses were conducted in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) versions 23 and 24. Individual items within each of the core areas were computed into 10 scale variables representing the core areas of interest: cultural adjustment, self-understanding, skills identification, job search strategies, application package development, self-promotion, and maintaining employment, career optimism, interview anxiety, and attitudes toward diversity. A series of paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-test means for each of the 10 scale variables.

**Qualitative analysis.** This research study involved collection of qualitative data through two sources: daily reflections, and end of program verbal testimonials. Transcriptions of participant data contributions were analyzed through a system-



Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations of Significantly Different Pre- and Post-Test Survey Items/Scales*

Items/Scale <sup>1</sup>	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Cultural adjustment <sup>2</sup>	3.46 (.707)	4.09 (.650)
Self-understanding <sup>2</sup>	3.56 (.617)	4.15 (.739)
Skills identification	3.10 (.656)	3.96 (.786)
Job search strategies	2.60 (.828)	3.99 (.543)
Application package development	2.60 (.889)	3.74 (.583)
Self-promotion	2.53 (.911)	3.95 (.676)
Maintaining employment	2.33 (.710)	3.88 (.618)
Interview anxiety <sup>3</sup>	3.39 (.814)	2.76 (.803)

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated,  $p < .001$ ; <sup>2</sup>  $p < 0.005$ ; <sup>3</sup> Performance Anxiety subscale of the Measure of Anxiety in Selection Interviews (McCarthy & Goffin, 2004).

atic review of all qualitative data collectively, as types of information in the daily reflections and testimonials overlapped in both content and thematic contribution. Researchers reviewed testimonials to identify themes in two categories: (1) participant feedback about the structure and effectiveness of the group counselling program to assist with quality improvement (e.g. responses to the question ‘What did you like today? Dislike?’ and ‘Any suggestions for next time?’), and (2) participant contribution that indicated learning outcomes accomplished through the group counselling session or program as a whole (e.g. responses to the question ‘what did you learn today?’). Identifying themes within these two categories enabled the research team to better understand elements of the group counselling approach that were effective or that needed improvement, while also bolstering our understanding of change in participants’ know-

ledge and competencies based on learning outcome driven questions. This enriched our understanding and ability to effectively interpret findings from the quantitative data.

## Results

### Quantitative Results

Significant differences were identified in eight of the 10 core areas assessed in this study. Specifically, as predicted, participants were significantly higher in cultural adjustment  $t(31) = 3.80$ ,  $p < 0.005$ , self-understanding  $t(31) = 3.22$ ,  $p < 0.005$ , skills identification,  $t(31) = 4.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , job search strategies,  $t(31) = 7.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , application package development,  $t(30) = 8.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , self-promotion,  $t(31) = 7.16$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and strategies for maintaining employment,  $t(31) = 8.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , at the end of the program compared to at the beginning. Participants also reported significantly lower

levels of interview anxiety,  $t(31) = -3.80$ ,  $p < 0.001$  at the end of the program (see Table 2 for pre- and post-means and standard deviations of each scale). Students did not demonstrate the predicted increases in career optimism and attitude toward diversity over the course of the program.

### Qualitative Results

**Themes Indicating Student Learning and Development Outcomes.** Students provided daily reflections and end of program testimonials. A thematic analysis of these comments identified nine themes relating to students’ learning and development outcomes associated with the program. These themes aligned with eight core of the core areas of measurement that were assessed quantitatively (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Nine themes identified in thematic analysis of qualitative data, coupled with student quotes.*

Core Area	Student Quotes
Cultural Adjustment	'Before I took part in the group, I knew there was a difference in Chinese and Canadian job searching, but I didn't know what it was, so now I do.'
Self-Understanding	'...now I know who I am, and what career I'm looking for.'
Skills Identification	'What I learned from this group, I know how to improve my resume and know how to express myself in 30 seconds and now I even know the difference between good and bad skills'
Job Search Strategies	'I guess the most important [learning] was the job search and working strategies, those skills I use for networking and applying to the job market.'
Application Package Development	'The most important thing I learned was resumes, after recommendation of CAR strategies I came up with a better resume and cover letter. The job search process, it's helpful, so many tips on how to get the resume and cover letter done.'
Self-Promotion	'The most helpful things I learned for this session is giving a first impression to employers. I think that the thirty second elevator pitch contains the most helpful information, and helps you advertise yourself.'
Career Optimism	'I went into the session knowing nothing and I think it was scary and big and my questions were answered. Now I am confident about the topic and I can find a job.'
Interview Anxiety	'The interview mock practice boosted my confidence'
Attitudes Toward Diversity	'I learned that everyone is good at something and everyone is different and we can always learn from each other.'
General	'For me, I learned a lot, and then I remember our group at the beginning, and we didn't know each other, and now we're friends, and I really appreciate this opportunity to meet each other.'

**Themes Indicating Program Effectiveness and Areas for Improvement.** Additionally, four major themes were identified among recorded responses providing direct feedback on program effectiveness and opportunities for improvement:

- (1) Students affirmed the benefits of the group career counselling approach as an effective model for career service delivery for international students. Students appreciated the learning that emerged from the group structure; hearing stories and experiences of others validated students' own thoughts, feelings, and experiences in relation to securing employment in Canada.
- (2) Students expressed their

learning through daily reflections in a manner that helped counsellors identify that outcomes intended for the session had been met.

(3) Students specifically highlighted enjoying interactive activities that gave them time and space to put concepts into practice, while building their skills and confidence. Students repeatedly and consistently expressed benefiting most from case studies and practice and group discussion in their daily reflection. Practical, hands-on, and skill-building approaches were important to the success of the group counselling.

(4) Students provided valuable information for improving the program in the future; they expressed a desire for

more opportunities for one-on-one time with the counsellor, to share as a whole group, and more materials for advanced preparation/study (see Table 4 for example comments).

## Discussion

### Group Counselling Model and Implications for Career Counselling Practice

This study demonstrates that a group career counselling model presents an effective, efficient, and scalable approach to career service delivery for international students. As previously noted, the international student population within Canadian universities is growing, and Western University is no exception (AUCC, 2012; McMullen &

Table 4

*Themes and Sample Student Quotes from Daily Reflections*

Core Area	Student Quotes
(1) Affirmation of group counselling model	<p>'enjoyed practice part and learning from partner'</p> <p>'I like reading and watching each other's resumes, and giving feedback so that we could make improvements'</p> <p>'Everyone is open about their thoughts and experiences. I learned a lot from others.'</p> <p>'I learned how to answer several kinds of [interview] questions, started to think of behavioural questions, and learned what to wear for an interview'</p> <p>'[learned] negotiation at work place, how to take a job offer, employee's rights in Canada'</p> <p>'[learned] the differences between introverts and extroverts and my personality. This really resolves some of my puzzles and I have a clearer picture of myself.'</p>
(2) Students' demonstration of learning	<p>'I learned the aspects I should consider when career planning and how to contribute my experiences to my career'</p> <p>'Culture shock and how to cope with difficulties while in Canada'</p> <p>'The resources that I can use (on or off campus), some important points about finding a job.'</p> <p>'Case studies based on real life applications. This helped me solve my personal questions'</p>
(3) Benefits of hands-on learning approaches and skill development	<p>'I liked practise for behaviour based questions'</p> <p>'I liked the small group presentations and the sample question handouts'</p> <p>'[Liked] teamwork activities'</p>
(4) Opportunities for program improvement (students' responses to 'any suggestions for next time?')	<p>'Another interview practice, how to search jobs specific for recent graduates'</p> <p>'Increase practice/discussion'</p> <p>'Get more practical job info, suggestions, materials on job hunting'</p> <p>'Examples of how to reject or accept job offers'</p> <p>'...more interactive activities'</p> <p>'More tips about Canadian workplace culture.'</p> <p>'More tips about resume building, specifically how to convert CV to resume and how to extract skills and challenges from past experiences'</p>

Elias, 2011). Offering a dedicated group career counselling program to address the unique needs of international students accomplishes a number of important outcomes. International students perceive that the institution values their needs and offers specific supports dedicated to assisting them in accomplishing their career goals. This has potential to support ongoing recruitment of international students, and fostering a supportive environment where international students feel valued.

The group career counselling model for international students effectively met several unique career development

outcomes related to barriers that international students commonly face when entering the Canadian job market. Specifically, the group model was effective at increasing international students' cultural adjustment, self-understanding, skills identification, job search strategies, application package development, self-promotion, and skills and knowledge relevant to their ability to maintain employment. Participants also demonstrated significantly reduced interview anxiety from the beginning to the end of the group counselling program. These changes were demonstrated both through significant pre-post quantitative findings in

addition to participants' reflections of their learning through testimonials and daily reflections. Participants reported enhanced knowledge and skills related to networking, understanding interview expectations, and recognition of the value of international experience, which could be expected to enhance their ability to overcome job search barriers identified by Arthur and Flynn (2012) and Sangganjanavanich and colleagues (2011). Beyond navigating job search processes, participants also increased knowledge and skills relevant to maintaining employment, identified by Zunker (2006), through understanding cultural differences in

workplace norms and values such as non-verbal communication, managing conflict, and understanding differences in power and status between an immediate boss and subordinate (eg. negotiating a contract with a supervisor).

This study demonstrates an effective, evidence-based model that meets unique career needs of international students that have been identified in the literature.

In addition to career development-specific client outcomes, participants identified additional benefits to the group counselling model relative to individual counselling, such as affirmation of their emotions and experiences, and opportunities to learn from peers' experiences. Furthermore, the group model presents opportunities to engage in interactive, hands on practice of skills, and solicit feedback from counsellors and peers, which students reported to be both enjoyable and a valuable learning experience.

The group career counselling program presents an efficient and scalable model that has potential for growth in the post-secondary education sector with minimal incremental increases in human and financial resources. The efficiency of this approach is clearly demonstrated by comparing counsellor hours involved in facilitating a full group counselling cohort, relative to providing individual career counselling to each of the cohort participants. Provision of individual career counselling to a full group cohort would require a minimum of 360 counsellor hours, not including

preparation and debriefing time (24 in-session hours multiplied by 15 participants); comparatively, counsellor hours for the group model involves approximately 40 counsellor hours (24 hours in-session, and 16 hours [2 hours per session] of preparation and debriefing time). Once session content has been developed and delivered once by a counsellor, the efficiency of the model increases over subsequent group counselling cohorts facilitated. There is an ongoing demonstration of need and interest for this program, with approximately four times as many international students expressing interest in group career counselling than the number of spaces available, demonstrating ongoing opportunities for expansion. This model presents a promising model to meet expanding demands of career services at postsecondary institutions as resources become increasingly scarce.

Given that international students are not the only population with specific career development needs, this program offers a foundation for structuring future groups targeted toward other unique populations. For example, there may be groups of students within specific Faculties, such as Science or Business, or based on academic career, such as undergraduate or graduate, who could benefit from a group format with like-minded peers exploring specific content tailored to their needs. Other potential unique populations that would benefit from a group format could include students with disabilities,

Indigenous students, mature students, and students who identify as LGBTQ2+ who are exploring transitions from university into employment. As noted, there are several benefits to increasing feelings of normalization and extension of participants' social and professional networks.

### Limitations

As an applied research study primarily intended to evaluate outcomes of this group counselling program, there are a number of limitations with regard to scope and scale of this research. First, we did not establish a control group of international students who did not participate in the group counselling program to assess whether changes measured could be related to general student learning and development outside of the program. Second, participants in the study self-selected to participate in the group counselling program and the research study, potentially leading to a sample of students who are more motivated to engage in career development than the general international student population. Furthermore, all participant measures were self-report, based on an individual participants' reflection of their learning and growth; we were not able to include behavioural measures (eg. direct assessment of application package quality) or measure long term career outcomes within the scope of this project. Last, reliability and validity assessments have not been established for the



internally developed outcome measures included in this study. These limitations considered, we feel that participants' quantitative and qualitative reports of growth, coupled with counsellor assessments of client progress over the course of this group counselling program provides strong early evidence that group career counselling is an effective and scalable model for career service provision for international students.

### Future Directions

This study fills a current gap in research on effectively meeting career development needs of international students who pursue university abroad and wish to maintain employment in their country of study. Additionally, we have established an evidence-based and highly scalable approach to meeting ongoing career needs. Recognizing the potential of the group counselling model for other niche groups, and in other psychoeducational settings, our team intends to work toward developing a toolkit and facilitation guide to support colleagues in the sector in offering group counselling at their respective institutions. Our team is also exploring opportunities to measure the long term career outcomes of international students who participated in the group program relative to a control group of their peers who did not engage in group counselling. This will involve reaching out to students both one and two years post-graduation to identify

their employment status, and level of satisfaction with their employment status. Additional work is required with larger groups of research participants to establish reliability and validity measures of the outcome-based career development measures developed in house for this study. The current study establishes initial evidence that group counselling models offer effective, efficient, and scalable approaches to meeting the unique needs and increasing service demands of international students, and other potential target populations.

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